



# Viva SEVILLA!

Time for some culture this month, as **Helen Ochyra** headed to Seville to soak up its Iberian charms that range from unhurried tranquillity to fiery Latin excitement

**S**ultry, sweaty and oh-so-Spanish, Seville is one hot destination. This is a city that swelters year-round, never needing to tuck itself away in jumpers and indoors, instead preferring to let it all hang out in polka-dot dresses, on the streets and in the bars.

The spiritual home of tapas, flamenco and bullfighting, Seville conjures up images of passion, intensity and the exotic. No surprises then that it has been the setting for numerous thrillers, from Robert Wilson's disturbingly grotesque *The Blind Man of Seville* to Dan Brown's popular, fast-paced *The Digital Fortress*.

But this vibrant city's fiery character is far from fictitious; and it doesn't take long to uncover its soul, providing, of course, you know where to look.

Perhaps the most uninhibited expression of the city's character is found in flamenco, that emotional, fervid dance of twirling skirts and stamping feet. Flamenco music is everywhere here, from the amateur but impassioned buskers on

the streets to the radio in your taxi, and the city is the proud home of the Museo del Baile Flamenco, an engaging museum which goes a long way to explaining this haunting dance's roots and context. But, admirable though this may be, the dance's real heart cannot be expressed in exhibits and performances for the tourists; it can only be found in the hot, sticky clubs and bars where bone fide Sevillanos strut their stuff to live, raw guitar music.

Such places do not run to a schedule, so forget making plans and wander instead along the streets of La Triana, the city's old gypsy quarter across the river. Along

Calle Betis the clubs and bars spill out onto the riverbank creating a ceaseless party atmosphere that doesn't run out of steam until dawn. Here you'll find plain but popular Lo Nuestro where nightly live sevillanos and rumba performances and a laid-back party-loving crowd make a sure-fire hit with flamenco first-timers.

Tucked away one street back on Calle Pagés del Corro is the vino-fuelled and slightly unhinged Casa

Anselma where the eponymous owner herself kicks things off in haunting, deeply sensual song before local dancers take to the floor. This is the sort of place you plan to have one drink and end up leaving at dawn, feet aching, veins pumped with wine.

For drinking without the dancing, a heady variety of packed-out bars can be found around Plaza Alfalfa and Alameda de Hércules where on weekends the crowds literally stop traffic. There's live music of every variety from Latina to electronica at Fun Club, while at La Antigua Bodeguita you can down cold beers with a relaxed crowd outside on the plaza.

But it's not all about the nightlife here; sport is big business in Seville and if you time your visit to include a weekend there's a good chance that a top football club will be in town for either La Liga or the Champions League. First division (and, for now at least, Champions



▲ Museo del Baile Flamenco



▲ La Triana, Seville's historic gypsy quarter



▲ Plaza Alfalfa



▲ Estadio Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán, home to Sevilla FC

League) club Sevilla play at Estadio Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán with matches most often taking place on Sundays. Tickets for La Liga matches are usually still available on the day from the stadium's taquillas (ticket windows). The city's other club, Real Betis, were relegated last season to the second division but still promise a good game at their stadium, Manuel Ruiz de Lopera, where a loyal following makes for a fantastic atmosphere.

A very different sort of sporting event, bullfighting, makes for a more traditionally Spanish afternoon out. Seville's Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza on Paseo de Colón, is known as the cathedral of bullfighting and is generally regarded as the most beautiful and important bullring in the world. Fights last for a couple of hours and involve the killing of six bulls in a true spectacle of the grotesque. The cast of three matadors, two picadors mounted on horseback and three banderilleros wielding sticks taunt and tease the bull to confuse and weaken it before the matador strikes the final blow with his sword through the animal's heart. The kill is not always clean and vast quantities of blood often cake the sand so

when buying your ticket think seriously about how close you can stand to be; the first three rows, the filas, are not for the squeamish, while seats in the shade will normally offer a closer view of the action than those in the sun.

A trip to Seville needn't be action-packed from dawn until dusk, the city has another, more languid, side, characterised by quiet, shaded squares drooped with orange trees. The old Jewish quarter, Barrio Santa Cruz, is a maze of streets where you'll find atmospheric bars in every corner and courtyard.

Next to the Murillo gardens is La Cava del Europa where the menu matches the seasons and has an international flavour, while nearby La Fresquita serves up José's spicy snails to a largely local clientele. But perhaps the best place to sample traditional tapas is Casa Plácido, a tourist-scaring joint where jamones (hams) hang from the ceiling above a sloping

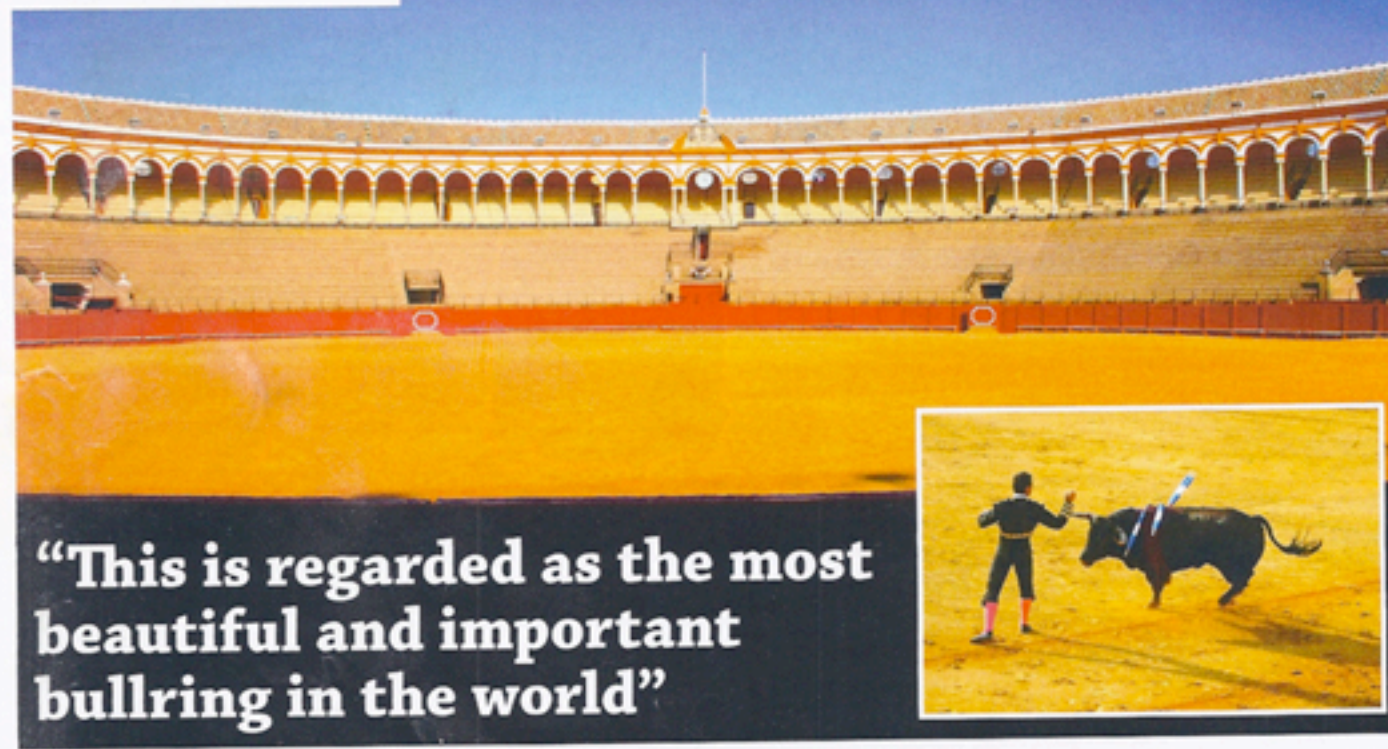
## HIT THE TABLES

There's only one place to head for in Seville to gamble and that's the Gran Casino Aljarafe in Tomares, just outside the city centre. This large, modern casino played host to the Spanish Poker Tour in April of this year and has 100 slot machines and 25 gaming tables as well as five different restaurants. American roulette, blackjack, poker, midi punto banco and Caribbean poker are all on offer daily from 6pm to 4am and there's also a weekly Texas Hold 'Em championship. Join their Club GCA for news on upcoming events and tournaments. [www.grancasinoaljarafe.es](http://www.grancasinoaljarafe.es)



wooden bar and the walls are covered in ancient Feria de Abril festival posters. Outside dishes such as albondigas (meatballs) and patatas bravas (brave potatoes – so named for their fiery flavour) are served at simple wooden tables past which the whole world saunters; it's the perfect place to soak up Seville, and raise a glass to the spirit of this intoxicating city. ☑

▲ Plaza de Toros de la Real Maestranza, the 'cathedral of bullfighting'



**"This is regarded as the most beautiful and important bullring in the world"**

